

Critical education for systemic change: A world-systems analysis perspective

Tom G. Griffiths

University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia.

Abstract

This paper both draws on, and seeks to apply, world-systems analysis to a broad, critical education project that builds mass schooling's potential contribution to the process of world-systemic change. In short, this is done by first setting out the world-systems analysis account of the current state, and period of transition, of the capitalist world-system, followed by some initial consideration of strategies for curricular reform within systems of mass schooling that might contribute to a transition toward a most equal, just and democratic, a socialist, alternative world-system. These considerations intended as contributions to discussion and debate within the critical education community about what might be possible within the boundaries of existing systems of mass schooling, inspired by a world-systems perspective on an uncertain transition toward a non-capitalist future.

Keywords: world-systems analysis, antisystemic movement, critical world-systems education.

Introduction

The year 2015 sees us a quarter of a century after the collapse of historical socialism in Europe, with many and perhaps most in our national systems of education largely unaware of it, and simultaneously sees us in the midst of China's continued rise within the capitalist world-economy, driven by a capitalist growth model of capital accumulation led by the Chinese Communist Party. As is perhaps always the case, we live in strange and interesting times. This paper does not seek to contribute directly to the (re)evaluation of the historical experience of twentieth century socialism in power, but acknowledges a significant move in educational scholarship to reconsider education under historical socialism, and increasingly to identify features like its universal, secular, and free character, that need to be and in some cases are being reasserted and reclaimed (e.g. Griffiths and Millei, 2013; Silova, 2010). This work connects with that of contemporary researchers and social movements rejecting the transitology logic in studies of 'post-socialist' societies, whereby all systems, structures and practices of socialism were left behind as these societies transited towards capitalism.

Our current context includes the ongoing global hegemony of neoliberal policy frameworks, and major points of resistance to the neoliberal offensive. From a world-systems analysis perspective, Wallerstein (2000, pp. 144-45) described the dominant neoliberal logic as "the

predominance of an unfettered free flow of the factors of production, all in non-governmental hands, and most especially the free flow of capital”. World-systems analysts see the neoliberal project as a counter-offensive by capital seeking to restore global profit rates, and so to shore up the endless accumulation of capital as a defining feature of the capitalist world-economy (e.g. Li, 2008; Wallerstein, 2001). Austerity policies have been one consequence seeing states reduce spending on public services, and attempt to lower (or at least minimise increases in) wages, linked to reduced tax rates for capital / business, and pressure from capital to increase public spending on infrastructure and other projects that subsidise private profits (Wallerstein, 2013). Resistance to the neoliberal offensive is widespread and varied, extending to social movements, organised political parties, and in cases like Venezuela national governments implementing an explicit anti-neoliberal program (for a review of developments across Latin America see Ellner, 2014).

Drawing on world-systems analysis, particularly as elaborated over decades by Immanuel Wallerstein, this paper sets out an argument that capitalism as a global system is in a phase of unprecedented crisis, and systemic change, transitioning towards an (uncertain but possible) world-system in which the endless accumulation of capital, based on the extraction of surplus value, will no longer be the driving force of the world-economy. The transition towards an alternative system is driven by a series of structural tensions reaching their limits and which are irresolvable under the logic of endless capitalist accumulation. The paper then argues for critical education that directly and explicitly seeks to contribute to the transition under these conditions of systemic crisis and global instability. This argument is premised on a world-systems interpretation that capitalist *as a global system* is in crisis and transition, and hence that collective efforts to move toward and shape a socialist alternative needs education that develops students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions about and for such a transition. Such an education involves interventions in formal curricular and pedagogical systems, and broader popular education initiatives, that can expand students’ understanding of current social reality and its history, and build participation in the political actions required to both imagine and move towards post-capitalist / socialist alternatives.

In keeping with the focus of this special issue, the argument here explicitly supports the idea of socialism as a utopian force in the shaping of history. It is a call for political and educational action to realise, in our times, long-standing socialist goals of human emancipation, of greater levels of equality, of deeper and truly participatory democracy, and of peace with justice. Evidence of the need for such goals in current times is overwhelming, even if we rely on mainstream accounts of current conflict, inequality within and between states, and particularly the movements and displacement of people across the world fleeing conflict, persecution, and misery. What contribution can we make, as critical educators, to move in a classic utopian sense towards a potential future? This is not a naïve and uncritical attempt to resurrect historical socialism, nor justify what Hobsbawm (2002) described as its “landscape of material and moral ruin,” (p. 127). As has been well established, the utopian force of socialism, with a capacity to inspire action, is and must be critically aware of the dystopian potential of social and political movements that tie their legitimacy to the pursuit of socialist goals. It is in this respect also that I draw inspiration from Wallerstein’s world-

systems analysis, and particularly his (1998) description of the utopian force being put forward here as one based on:

the serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgement as to the substantive rationality of alternative possible historical systems ... Not the face of the perfect (and inevitable) future, but the face of an alternative, credibly better, and historically possible (but far from certain) future (pp. 1-2).

Capitalist crisis and systemic change

It is this sense of a credible, substantively rational, utopian future, which underpins a world-systems analysis understanding of capitalism and its crisis and transition. This can be seen to connect with Badiou's (2008) intervention outlining the 'communist hypothesis' for contemporary times, in which the idea of socialism, or communism, with its utopian force to inspire action, is and must be grounded in the idea that "a different collective organization is practicable" (p. 35), extending to a universal idea of existence. While never a simple linear and purely economically determined process, what Badiou (2008) described as the "unified world of capital" involving "the brutal division of human existence into regions separated by police dogs, bureaucratic controls, naval patrols, barbed wire and expulsions" (p. 38), reinforces a universal socialist project, or universal idea of socialism, as a viable response to the inequalities, injustices, and miseries of life under global capitalism.

As indicated above, in what follows I am drawing heavily on Immanuel Wallerstein's work to set out a case for the capitalist world-system being in a period of system crisis, and change / transition toward an alternative system. World-systems analysis offers one long-standing perspective on the historical development of capitalism as a world-system, and its structural crisis. Wallerstein's work, as a founder and ongoing proponent of world-systems analysis, includes a detailed argument about the short-term cycles and longer-term trends of the capitalist world-economy, with each return to 'equilibrium' from the cyclical crises of capitalism effectively ratcheting the longer-term trends up toward a series of absolute limits, which are irresolvable under the logic of capitalism and endless capital accumulation (see Wallerstein, 1974 for the early, detailed account). This work draws directly on Marxist theorising to identify and understand the inherent contradictions and structural limits of capital accumulation under capitalism. While perhaps less controversial in current contexts, Wallerstein's work has consistently rejected determinist or evolutionary Marxist accounts that posited all national societies as progressively and inevitably moving through sequential stages of feudalism, capitalism, socialism and communism; in favour of a perspective that takes the capitalist world-system / world-economy as the primary unit of analysis. From this position, a wide range of labour relations, rates of fully proletarianised labour, and forms of labour control, within and between nations, are incorporated within the normal operation of the capitalist world-economy. Mielants (2012, p. 59) summary of the debates over the nature and temporal location of the transition from feudalism to capitalism highlighted how this approach led to world-systems analysis being in the unusual position of being criticized for being Marxist by liberal and Smithian theorists, while "Orthodox Marxists claim no affiliation with the perspective".

The Marxist character of world-systems analysis is reflected in its account of regular cycles of expansion and contraction of the capitalist world-economy, linked to declining rates of profit and subsequent destruction of capital. This occurs as leading and usually monopolistic industries in core zones fuel growth and accumulate high levels of capital, before increased competition and over-production lead to declining rates of profit and recession (see for example Wallerstein, Collins, Mann, Derlugian, & Calhoun, 2013). It is through this regular cycle of expansion and contraction that industries are relocated to other zones of the world-economy in search of cheaper labour to restore rates of profit, accounting for a series of shifts over time of industrial activity from the core to the semiperiphery and periphery, while the core areas invest in new ‘quasi-monopolies’ that drive the next cycle of expansion and capital accumulation. Capital’s shift of production to the financial sphere, as part of the move to restore profits, has long been a part of this process. The argument here is that while each cycle restores the world-economy to some sort of equilibrium, the recurring cycles contribute to longer-term secular trends, whereby structural contradictions that are associated with these cycles and characteristic of the capitalist system as a totality, are moving incrementally toward their absolute limit, the consequence of which is the fundamental unravelling of the prevailing, historical, capitalist world-system.

The particular trends approaching their absolute limits all relate to the systemic imperative of our current world-system to maximize and maintain the endless accumulation of capital. These limits are seen in multiple structural tendencies squeezing profits. The first of these involves the long-standing tension confronting capital seeking to lower wages to reduce production costs and increase profits, and simultaneously increase rates of consumption and demand to maintain and increase profits, requiring wage growth. The response of capital to relocate production to semiperipheral and peripheral areas is driven by the search for lower wages, supported by semi-proletarianised labour (Wallerstein, 1979). Wallerstein (1983, p. 39) has argued that this process has seen the “profit-reducing process of increased proletarianisation”, in some areas off-set by the profit-increasing process of incorporating semi-proletarianised, and so low-wage, work-forces into geographically relocated production. But this relocation of capital, and associated process of incorporating new labour-forces into capitalist production, has concrete geographical and structural limits. Sources of new sites for capital relocation decline over time, while areas incorporated are likely to follow historical trends of increased wages and higher rates of proletarianisation, further exacerbating this tension. Wallerstein (1998, p. 42), for example, highlighted the short-term nature of the relocation ‘solution’ to declining profits, observing how the relative weakness of workers in peripheral areas, which underpins their low-wages in semi-proletarianised structures, diminishes over time.

The case of China, as part of an expanding semiperiphery (Li, 2008, pp. 91-110) is instructive here. At the global level, the relocation strategy for capital to renew profits and maintain levels of global surplus flowing to core areas / states, whereby this surplus has historically supported higher wages and conditions within core areas, is under intense pressure. Li’s (2008) work makes the case for how the relocation of production to China has contributed to the impetus to fully proletarianise labour, which over the long-term adds to pressure on

profits, particularly as a more widely proletarianised labour force improves its bargaining power for an increased share of surplus value being generated. Li (2008) also describes how the case of China, and other countries with growing rates of consumption and moving into the semi-periphery, or a 'semi-core' location of the world-economy, adds to ecological pressures.

World-systems analysis has highlighted the historical phenomenon of capital externalising the environmental costs of production, passing these costs on to the state in what has amounted to a public subsidy of private profits. These costs have been described in terms of waste and the renewal of primary resources (Wallerstein, 2005, p. 1271), with the former most commonly experienced as the clean-up costs that have historically been socialised, while profits from the production activity that created them remain privatised. In a recent review essay, Wallerstein (2010) argued that while this externalization of production costs had been normal practice in the capitalist world-economy, as the costs in terms of both public health and on public finances have increased and intensified, greater demands for ever greater regulation, and for corporations to internalize these costs, have followed. This adds to the pressure on Capital to maintain profit rates and capital accumulation. What is evident here is heightened popular pressure for environmental damage and the current global environmental crisis to be addressed, underpinned by heightened levels of public awareness of the problems. This extends to the intensifying social and political crises associated with global warming, which itself puts at risk the very capacity of the world to sustain human life in the long-term.

The contradictory pressures on both the state and capital are intensified under these conditions, making up perhaps the most critical tendency of capitalism that is reaching an absolute limit. There is pressure on governments to resolve the environmental crises – from immediate problems to the larger, structural phenomenon, that almost inevitably involve a combination of increased taxation of capital, and its internalization of these costs. Efforts to minimise costs through relocating production continue but are also structurally limited. The pressures from growing levels of consumption in former peripheral parts of the world that Li (2008) highlights, exacerbate this problem. As discussed below, there is arguably a growing consensus, including from non-Marxist perspectives, that 'business as usual' under capitalism is incapable of resolving the environmental crisis confronting the globe (e.g. Magdoff & Bellamy Foster, 2011; Mander, 2012). World-systems analysis would agree, adding both that the defining feature of capitalism – the endless accumulation of capital – is a structural cause of the environmental crisis; and that this adds to the crisis of the capitalist world-system and its potential transition to an alternative system based on an alternative logic.

The global environmental crisis highlights another related and key dimension relating to profits and capital accumulation: systemic pressures on taxation. The long-term trend in this case involves ongoing and growing demands on the state across the world for public spending on essential social services (e.g. health care, education, income and housing security, etc.), coupled with consistent and growing demands from Capital for the state to provide publicly funded infrastructure, incentives, and subsidies to support its activity, frequently under the banner of providing jobs and contributing to growth of national

economies. These demands grow inexorably, but are simultaneously accompanied by pressure from Capital for reduced levels of corporate taxation (to further maintain profits), and, particularly under neoliberal logic, policies from major political parties for reduced income tax under the banner of allowing individual to choose and purchase their own social services. As pointed to in the introduction to this paper, this is tied up with the generalized neoliberal response of reduced spending on public services and austerity. At the systemic level we see the resultant pressure on states across the world, and with no meaningful way to resolve this tension to the satisfaction of capital, the environmental crises, and populations. A recent attempt to do so that we are currently witnessing in Greece has sharply highlighted the structural limits on states operating within the capitalist world-economy, and the need for systemic change.

For world-systems analysts, these processes cumulatively ratchet up over time, beyond cycles, to produce systemic crises, as the various contradictions cannot be resolved under the systemic conditions and requirements of the capitalist world-economy and its imperative to support, and maximize, the endless accumulation of capital. As Wallerstein (1994, p. 15) argued, we are confronted with “the exhaustion of the systemic safety-valves ... none of the mechanisms for restoring the normal functioning of the system can work effectively any longer”. There are systemic implications for the modern nation-state, and the legitimacy of state structures as populations are confronted with the apparent inability of the state to meet their demands, whether for social spending and services, or for credible environmental solutions. On this point Wallerstein has long argued that the collapse of historical socialism should be interpreted as a marker of the collapse of a wider cultural framework of the world-system, of which the historical socialist states remained a part (for a full account of the thesis see Wallerstein, 1995; and see Wallerstein, 2011a for the emergence of a shared cultural framework of ‘centrist liberalism’ in the nineteenth century). The systemic crisis here is an entrenched and arguably growing loss of faith in the modern nation-state to deliver its liberal promise of national development, with improved social and economic well-being for all, through various forms of representative democracy.

Critical education for capitalist crisis and systemic change

As part of the broad movement seeking to re-appropriate the idea of communism and its emancipatory potential, Slavoj Žižek (2009) highlights the ongoing contemporary relevance of the “communist-egalitarian emancipatory idea” (p. 99). Žižek (2009) stresses the particular imperative of current times that demands this sort of thinking and action, being the very real risk of “the self-annihilation of humanity itself” (p. 91). Threats of global annihilation are not new, particularly in the age of nuclear weapons, but the trajectory of global climate change is a new and distinctive threat and, as foreshadowed above, one that is intrinsically associated with the capitalist world-economy’s defining logic of endless capital accumulation and growth. Magdoff and Bellamy Foster (2011, p. 27), for example, make it clear that business as usual, “is the path to global disaster”. What constitutes ‘business as usual’ involves many aspects, including things like the consumption of non-renewable resources, such that they highlight “it is necessary to understand more fully why ‘business as usual,’ as defined by

capitalism, makes the journey to a sustainable society impossible (p. 35). The imperative for endless, compound, growth and capital accumulation, characteristic of capitalism, clearly underlies this systemic crisis.

It is important to emphasise here how in some key respects, the push for endless growth, and ever expanding levels of material abundance, driven in part by the scientific exploitation of the natural environment, was a shared characteristic of capitalist and historical socialist states and their conceptions of and programs for national development. The shared cultural framework with respect to growth, development and consumption, under capitalism and socialism, is arguably part of what is losing legitimacy in terms of the ability of the nation-state to deliver, and part of what must be replaced for a viable, post-capitalist, alternative (for a concise review see Wallerstein, 2011b). The re-imagining of socialism, and its utopian potential to influence our understanding of social reality and action to create alternatives, must address this if it is to be a credible part of the solution.

The ecological imperative for systemic change is compelling, and cannot rely on Capital, nor established Political Parties and systems, to generate the sort of response and systemic change that is required. As Venezuela's former President Hugo Chávez succinctly proclaimed, we need to change the system, not the climate. Transitioning to green and sustainable industries is desirable and something many groups and parties advocate, but this must be accompanied with a break from capitalism's imperative of endless growth and capital accumulation. The viability then of so-called 'green capitalism' responses, putting forward ecologically sustainable modes of energy delivery, production and consumption, operating under a capitalist logic, is flawed. As Magdoff and Bellamy Foster (2011) argue:

A system that has only one goal, the maximisation of profits in an endless quest for the accumulation of capital on an ever-expanding scale, and which thus seeks to transform every single thing on earth into a commodity *with a price*, is a system that is soulless; it can never have a soul, never be green. It can never stand still, but is driven to manipulate and fabricate whims and wants in order to grow and sell more ... forever. Nothing is allowed to stand in its path (p. 96).

In arguing that there is no green capitalist solution, they add that proposed reforms to capitalism without systemic change, such as regulations to reign in endless growth and accumulation and pursue a strategy of zero growth, for example, "violates the basic motive force of capitalism" (p. 56) and so are just not feasible.

In a recent volume entitled *Does Capitalism Have a Future?*, Wallerstein et al. (2013) offer a range of scenarios, based on some shared understandings of the nature and scope of the current crisis of global capitalism. They conclude their collective introduction to the volume by affirming:

Yet optimism is a necessary historical condition for mobilizing energies in a world facing the choice of structurally divergent opportunities. Breakthroughs become possible when enough support and public attention go into thinking and arguing about alternative designs (Wallerstein et al., 2013, p. 8).

Critical education is, under these conditions, an essential part of any collective creation of systemic transition towards a post-capitalist, and viable socialist, alternative. This point is of course foundational to a critical education / critical pedagogy perspective, and so hardly needs stating for readers already committed to this sort of understanding of the nature and purpose of our work as educators. The emphasis I want to make here is for an education that contributes directly and explicitly to the breakthroughs these authors refer to, by focusing our curricular and pedagogical interventions in educational contexts on critical understandings of capitalism, its current crises, the imagining of alternative systems, and the political actions to achieve social transformation.

Perhaps this advocacy for a critical education based on what is, what could be, and how to get there, is seen as too simplistic, and as nothing new. I am aware of the long history and multiple trajectories of critical education (see for example Griffiths & Imre, 2013). The intent here is to explicitly build on those traditions which see critical education as both critique of existing systems, structures and practices; and as overt and systematic efforts to direct education to the development of students' capacity for a critical reading of reality, as a basis for their action to transform reality. I am trying to do this by connecting these with a world-systems analysis perspective that advocates these interrelated parts of our response to the structural crisis of capitalism. This is unashamedly about critical consciousness raising through education, aiming to build / contribute to wider social movements, what Wallerstein (2005) refers to as antisystemic movements, for systemic change. Critical educators have, over many decades, detailed ways in which existing systems of education, through their organizational, curricular and pedagogical practices, "reproduce dominant values that, ultimately, work counter to the very democratic ideals that schools seemingly promote ... [and] ... prepare young people to live with those contradictions and to accept them and to think they're OK" (Zinn & Macedo, 2012, p. 121). Disrupting these processes is at the heart of our work as critical educators committed to developing a socialist alternative.

The breadth of work under the critical pedagogy / critical education banner, however, has meant that much of the critique of the reproductive role of formal schooling in society falls short of either identifying capitalism as the source of the undemocratic and unequal social relationships that schooling helps to legitimise, or of calling for education to contribute to the transition from capitalism to a non-capitalist alternative. There are exceptions, whose work advocated teachers and educators use of critical practices to develop students' critical consciousness (e.g. McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007). This concept of critical education aims to build students' knowledge, capacity and disposition to both develop a critical reading and understanding of the capitalist world, its injustices and inequalities, and to take action, in turn, in order to transform this social reality. This sort of critical work can be located on one end of a continuum, focused on preparing populations to lead and participate in the transformation of society, in contrast to education that prepares citizens for the consensual participation within existing society and its structures.

Bringing world-systems analysis to this end of the critical pedagogy continuum also requires acknowledging and consciously transforming the reality of critical education being de-

politicised, or de-radicalised, or domesticated, and so advocating for what Martin (2007) referred to as revolutionary critical pedagogy. The sort of domestication of critical education can be seen in many teacher education programs, for example, the common use of Paulo Freire's (1970) critique of the 'banking concept', which likened the dominant pedagogical practice to banking in the sense of knowledge being deposited by educators into their students as though they were empty vessels. This is commonly invoked as part of the rationale for a more student-centred and / or constructivist approach to teaching in schools, with some sort of effort to take account of the knowledge that students themselves bring to the classroom context, which is of course is something to be supported. But the Freirean critique often ends there, so that Freire's work, and importance, is thus reduced solely to this banking concept of education which, in the spirit of de-politicized student-centred pedagogy, teachers should overcome. The conventional approach may even fail to acknowledge Freire's (1970, p. 60) description of how the dominant approach to teaching positioned students as:

... adaptable, manageable beings ... The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.

Freire's (1970) ground-breaking work articulated what an acutely politicized pedagogy of oppression look like, whereby formal education had been narrowed and reduced to an uncritical process of knowledge transfer, without even any rhetorical reference to students' critical understanding and evaluation of the knowledge being transferred / received. As is by now well established, such an approach restricts students' even incidental treatment, let alone their explicit and conscious reflection on, their place in the world, and on their potential contributions to political action to change the world.

The alternative pedagogy advocated by Freire, and since taken up by many critical educators, emphasises authentic dialogue between educator and students, acknowledgment of the knowledge that students bring to the classroom as a basis for critical learning, but all of this as as pre-conditions for raising students' political consciousness to understand and act on the world. In advocating this sort of approach I am conscious of post-structural critiques of the implicit and explicit claims to truth, and so of associated critiques of such conceptualisations of capitalism's hegemony, of people's false consciousness under conditions of capitalism limiting their openness to and capacity to even imagine alternatives, and so the need to explicitly promote critical readings of social reality (for a comprehensive response to these critiques see Hill, McLaren, Cole, & Rikowski, 2002). In light of the challenges confronting humanity under conditions of global capitalism, these critiques need to be challenged. In discussing the structural impossibility of charitable initiatives to resolve the problem of hunger, for example, Freire (2007, p. 7) observed

we need to approach problems in such a manner as to invite people to understand the relationship between the problem and other factors, like politics and oppression ... it is up to us to make history and to be made and remade by it.

The world-systems critical education approach being advocated here stands by these sentiments, and the political project of educating to develop and extend students' critical understanding of social reality as a basis for their individual and collective action in and on the world, to achieve systemic change.

As is evident from some of the foundations cited above, under the critical pedagogy banner there exists a significant body of scholarship from Marxist perspectives, critically examining the ways in which education systems, their organization, curricula and pedagogies, work to maintain and legitimize the status quo of capitalist social reality (e.g. Hill, 2006, Allman, 2010). The critical perspective has similarly encompassed multiple other trajectories and dimensions of this problematic, including critique from feminist, culturally diverse and post-colonial perspectives that highlight particular dimensions or categories of oppression experienced under conventional or hegemonic systems and their dominant pedagogical practices (see for example Darder, 2011).

Critical world-systems education

The effort to insert world-systems analysis into critical education thought and action is, I am arguing, consistent with radical / revolutionary critical education traditions (for a fuller elaboration see Griffiths, 2013). This can be achieved by making a critical understanding of the capitalist world-system, its irresolvable crises within capitalist imperatives of endless capital accumulation and growth, and its transition toward a non-capitalist alternative, central and explicit purposes of education. There are no false claims of neutrality, acknowledging the reality that education and its institutions are never neutral. What might be called a 'critical world-systems education' approach could defend an expressed and over purpose to put education, including mass formal education, to the service of society and its transformation. This could potentially be achieved within existing policy frameworks of school systems, building on their references to forming global citizens to think critically, to build sustainable futures, to solve problems, etc.

This sort of approach would thus set out to re-appropriate and transform conventional and instrumental ideas that have characterized education under both capitalism and historical socialism, and their shared mode of preparing human capital for differential roles and trajectories within the capitalist world-economy. The radical / revolutionary alternative makes the primary purpose focused on educating populations with the critical knowledge, skills and dispositions to imagine and take action to realise alternative, non-capitalist futures, and so contribute to the building of global anti-systemic movements focused on transforming the world-system.

Work that develops critiques of capitalism and the operation of educational institutions under capitalism, is often criticized for its emphasis on critique and limited elaboration of alternatives. This sort of criticism is often used as a strategy to try and discredit radical critiques, and reinforce the idea that there are no viable alternatives to the status quo, and so that minor reforms to what currently exists is the best we might hope for. Wallerstein's work

has frequently set out broad strategies for intervening in the current crisis and transition, coupled with calls for clarity on the broad direction in which our work is aimed – a more just, equal, democratic and peaceful world-system. For example, in the concluding pages of the volume, *After Liberalism*, he writes:

You may think that the program I have outlined for judicious social and political action over the next twenty-five to fifty years is far too vague. But it is as concrete as one can be in the midst of a whirlpool. I have said essentially two things about life in a whirlpool. First, know to which shore you want to swim. And second, make sure that your immediate efforts seem to be moving in that direction. If you want greater precision than that, you will not find it, and you will drown while you are looking for it (Wallerstein, 1995, p. 271)

But what might a critical world-systems approach look like for educators in their work with students? What follows are some preliminary suggestions for an integrated curricular design, based around a set of organisational questions for students, inspired by world-systems analysis. These are not put forward as ‘the’ solution for critical education practice, and of course any attempts to develop and practice such a curricular design within formal school systems will inevitably need to authentically reflect particular local conditions, histories, politics, etc. They would similarly be open to challenge and debate. My point here is that world-systems analysis theorising can inform such an approach in a way that is consistent with a radical project of raising students’ critical consciousness of the reality of the capitalist world-system, its operation, the need to develop alternatives, and to take action that can contribute to their realisation.

Many education systems across the world have at least formally acknowledged the value of cross-disciplinary or more fully integrated approaches to curriculum knowledge, with a broad range of associated responses including the use of ‘rich tasks’ for students to work on over extended periods of time, which require the application of knowledge of multiple subject disciplines. World-systems analysis has the potential to connect directly with these prevailing conditions, advocating a “unidisciplinary” approach to knowledge that brings together nomothetic and idiographic epistemology and argues that “knowledge is in fact a singular enterprise, and there are no fundamental contradictions between how we may pursue it in the natural and in the human world, for they are both integral parts of a singular universe” (Wallerstein, 1997, p. 1254). Building on these grounds, we could argue for a set of organizational or thematic curricular questions that could guide our activities with students and their learning. An initial elaboration of these (see Griffiths, 2013, pp. 85-91) could look something like the following:

1. How can I understand the world in which we live, the ways in which we live in this world, and my place in this world (in my home or family, my local neighbourhood, town, state / province, country, region, etc.)?
2. What are some of the major problems confronting the world (e.g. environmental crises, poverty and inequality, war, the displacement of people, living together with diversity), and how has the world both created and tried to solve these problems (at multiple levels – home / family, neighbourhood, town, state / province, country, region...)?

3. How have successful responses been achieved, how can we know, and what can we learn from these experiences?
4. How can we imagine, describe, plan, alternative communities, societies, ways of being, and understandings of what is good in and for the world, including ideas of equality, peace with justice, democracy and sustainability in the fullest sense of these terms (environmental, social, economic, political, cultural...)?
5. What can we change in the world, to change the world and our ways of being in the world and move towards imagined alternatives that can overcome the major problems confronting our world?

Questions like these are an attempt to incorporate a world-systems characterisation of the tasks confronting us as we seek to influence the transition of the capitalist world-system, into mainstream systems of mass education. The intent is to build on / in existing spaces within education systems for developing students' thinking and understandings of what is and what ought to be. Wary of attempts to impose / transmit universal truths, the intended spirit here is one of openness to multiple strategies and utopian visions, based on a firm conviction that 'business as usual' cannot proceed, and that systemic change must occur at the global level to create an ecologically sustainable, peaceful, more equal and just world-system.

As a critical educator inspired by world-systems analysis, I highlight Wallerstein's (1997) acknowledgement of the socially constructed nature of knowledge, and the argument that we ought to prioritise "scholarly analyses that are more correct ... [and are] ... more socially useful in that they aid the world to construct a substantively more rational reality" (p. 1254). This is a claim that a critical analysis of capitalism and its operation as an historical system leads to an understanding of its demise and replacement with an alternative system, that has the potential to be a substantively better, more equal, just, democratic and peaceful system. Radical critical educators stand ready to defend these broad premises of our collective work, with ample empirical evidence of the injustices, the inequalities, the horrors of life for the majority of the world's population under the capitalist world-system.

Conclusion

In recent years Žižek (2009) wrote that socialism had become a competitor and threat to the communist idea, in the sense that the social democratic variant of socialism had worked historically to counter, and contain, more radical communist critiques of and threats to capitalism. This sort of critique aligns in some respects with world-systems arguments of a shared cultural framework running across historical socialism and capitalism – focused on ideas of linear and endless national economic development and growth, led by rational policy makers in State power. From this perspective, what began as anti-systemic / anti-capitalist movements, over time and once in power, lost their anti-systemic character (e.g. Wallerstein, 2011a). What these and other scholars make clear is that under contemporary conditions, ideas and utopian ideals of socialism and communism can and must continue to inspire thought and action for imagining and constructing alternatives to capitalism and the

associated inequalities and injustices that characterise capitalism as an historical world-system.

A central aim of this paper has been to argue for the injection of world-systems analysis into our thinking about radical and revolutionary critical education and practice, and in so doing to emphasise the need to focus our educational efforts on developing students' knowledge, skills and dispositions to contribute to the systemic change that we are experiencing. Like any effort this is incomplete, is open to critique from within critical education circles and beyond. I have tried to maintain in this work an explicit a sense of openness about interpretations of our current reality, debate about strategies for its transformation, and so debate about curricular and pedagogical interventions that can and should be pursued as part of a broader critical education project. But these are approached with the explicit political convictions set about above, coupled with a sense of hope that "these our times, and it is the moment when social scientists will demonstrate whether or not they will be capable of constructing a social science that will speak to the worldwide social transformation through which we shall be living" (Wallerstein, 1999, p. 201).

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Author details

Tom G. Griffiths is a senior lecturer in comparative and international education at the University of Newcastle, Australia. His recent books include a 2013 co-authored volume, *Mass Education, Global Capital, and the World: The Theoretical Lenses of István Mészáros and Immanuel Wallerstein*, and co-edited *Logics of Socialist Education: Engaging with Crisis, Insecurity and Uncertainty*. Tom's research is centred on the actual and potential contribution of education to the creation of a more democratic, equal, peaceful, and just world-system.

Correspondence: tom.griffiths@newcastle.edu.au